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SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER TERM, 1952

No. 8

OLIVER BROWN, MRS. RICHARD LAWTON, MRS.
SADIE EMMANUEL, ET AL., APPELLANTS,

vs.

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA, SHAWNEE
COUNTY, KANSAS, ET AL.

APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
DISTRICT OF KANSAS

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BETTIE BELK, having been first duly sworn, assumed the stand and testified as follows:

Direct examination.

By Mr. Carter:

Q. Miss Belk, what is your occupation?

A. At the present time I am on the staff of the Workshop in Human Relations at the University of Kansas City, Missouri.

[fol. 292] Q. What is your educational background?

A. I have my Bachelor's Degree from State Teachers College in Worcester, Massachusetts, my Master's Degree from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and, at the present time, I am working on my Ph.D. in Human Development at the University of Chicago.

Q. Miss Belk, what other than your present employment at the University of Kansas City—what other job experience have you had?

A. I have taught junior and senior high school in Indiana for two years; for ten years I was employed by the Y. W. C. A., first as director of the teen age program in Trenton, New Jersey, and for five years as a member of the national staff as a consultant on the teen age program. In that capacity I did work in the midwest; Kansas was one of the twelve states in the area that I served, and I have worked with the local organization here on their problems of teen age program. At the university I have been employed as a research assistant in the study of developmental tasks of adolescents and, during the past year, I have been on the staff of the Center for Inter-Group Education.

Q. Have you published any books or articles on the problems of adolescents?

A. Yes, for the Y. W. C. A. I published several articles on teen age problems and a pamphlet designed for training adult leaders to work with teen agers.

Q. Do you belong to any professional societies?

A. Yes. I am a member of the National Association of Group Workers.

Q. What is your field of major interests?

A. Well, my recent experience has been in training adults to work with groups, and I am particularly interested in this aspect of human development. My work at the present time is in the training of adult leadership for this kind of job.

Q. That is the training of an adult—of adults to work with adolescents and so forth?

A. Yes.

Q. Now, assume, Miss Belk, that the City of Topeka has organized its public school system so that a child enters the first grade at approximately the age of six; goes through the elementary schools, six grades; he would be entering a junior high school at approximately the age of twelve. Assume that for the first six grades the schools in Topeka are maintained on a segregated basis. Thereafter, the junior high schools and high schools, the schools are integrated. Based upon your experience and your knowledge, would you give an opinion as to whether or not it would be harmful—it would have any adverse effect on the child at that stage of his development to move from a segregated educational [fol. 294] pattern into an integrated pattern?

A. I would say that by bringing children together for the first time at this age, the Board of Education is working a real hardship on both the negro and white children, and I would like to explain why, if I may.

Q. Please do so.

A. I think that it is a well established fact that the years just preceding age 12, the years 10 to 12, roughly, for girls and 11 to 13 for boys, are the years during which the important physical and physiological changes take place. The child at age 12 is trying to integrate two to five inches of standing height that he had acquired very rapidly. He is also trying to integrate very important physiological changes. In our society, girls reach puberty at about twelve and a half and boys at about thirteen and a half, and they are adjusting to really a new kind of body for them because of the changes which have taken place. There are social changes that take place also at this age; changes take place within the school system itself. Up until this point the child has been accustomed to a school situation in which he has related to one adult. Now he moves into what we

call a departmentalized pattern. He has several teachers; he moves from one classroom to another. In other words, he has a pattern of relationship with many important adults in the school system. Also, at this age the child moves [fol. 295] from a peer society which has been largely made up of members of the same sex, into a heterosexual society. The seventh grade is a crucial one for girls, particularly, because they become interested in boys before boys become interested in them, and this is a very difficult time for them to live through. All in all, these are the years when children are making some of their most important life adjustments, and I would say that having been brought up in a separate system where they can only learn that negroes and white are different, they must at this age then make an adjustment to living with someone that they have learned is different, and I think that this puts an additional adjustment on them at an age when it is very difficult for them to make it.

Cross-examination.

By Mr. Goodell:

Q. Is it Miss or Mrs. Belk?

A. It's Miss Belk.

Q. Are you familiar with the City of Topeka and the customs and usages with respect to inter-racial matters?

A. I have visited the City of Topeka as a consultant for the Y. W. C. A., yes.

Q. Do you realize that for half a century, to some degree, there has been segregation practiced in the business world and in the social strata of this community?

A. I believe that I have heard that there is segregation in [fol. 296] in the community, yes.

Q. Without regard to the merits, if that is a fact, assuming—strike that—that there is segregation practiced in the ordinary workday life of the community in the business world and in the social strata as of our two races here, negro and the white, and assuming further for the purpose of this question that there were no segregation in the first six grades of our public school system, and the negro children were absorbed in the present existing white schools;

where they were outnumbered twenty-five to fifty to one and, in some cases, more than that, would you reform your opinion any, taking that into account?

A. No, I would not.

Q. Do you know what the natural tendencies are in a practical world? Would it be customary, where children come from homes—living in a community where segregation is practiced other than in the schools, for those same white children to carry on that same custom and usage in their relations with the race—with the opposite race—the negro.

A. I don't understand your question.

Q. Well, assuming that segregation, as I have just stated, as practiced in this community in Topeka, in the city, outside of the school, and that is a fact, children coming from homes in this community, isn't it very natural that they [fol. 297] would simply carry on that custom and usage in their relations with other negro students of the opposite race?

A. Well, I think our recent studies have shown that children, adolescents particularly, take most of their social pattern from their peers rather than their parents; in fact, it's one of the real problems in our American society today that this is true.

Q. Who are the children, what do you mean by that, that the negro children they would look upon as their peers and therefore they would follow them; what do you mean?

A. I mean that all adolescent children take most of their social patterns from people their own age; they tend to see each other as authorities. It's an age at which they break away completely from parental authority, in fact to the extent that it becomes a difficult problem in home-life, so it is not always the patterns of the parents that they are repeating; in fact, during this time they are forming their own values.

Q. I don't know as I understand it. You consider another child, that a child will look upon another white child as his peer, is that what you are getting at?

A. Yes.

Q. What is there about another child of the same age that would make him a peer as to another child?

A. This is one of the phenomena of development. The child must, in his growing up process, ultimately break [fol. 298] away from the home. Now adolescents in our society are treated at one moment as though they were children and the parents are very authoritarian with them and at another moment they are expected to behave like adults and, consequently, most of them are in some state of confusion as to what their status really is. But they are moving always toward adulthood, toward establishing their own values and, for this reason, they take more of their pattern—you can see it even in their dress. I don't know if you have any adolescent children of your own, but if you do you know they dress alike, they act alike, they talk alike. They get their values largely from each other at this age.

Q. Assuming for the purpose of this question, though, that segregation was abolished and the negro child was absorbed in the white school system and, for illustration, he was outnumbered in the particular school system on the average of thirty to one or twenty to one or any figure of that proportion; taking into account the natural factors of every-day life and the practicabilities of the situation, wouldn't that result in and of itself of him being a very small minority group and being left out of activities and the run of things, the negro child.

A. I do not think that that is necessarily true. In fact, in my own experience I have seen it not to be true.

[fol. 299] Q. Well, isn't that true within the white structure, that some children run things and others tag along; some are leaders and others aren't?

A. This is an individual matter. It is quite true.

Q. And to that extent where you have children that do run things, elected class officers and in all activities, make the teams and so forth, and in their own group, and in the other children that doesn't—aren't given recognition in that sense, that child—this philosophy of yours, this theory of yours, is made to feel second-class and left out of things, isn't that right, of his own group.

A. Of his own group, yes, and most of us who work in

inter-group relations nowadays see this as a total thing. There is no longer any stress on negro-white relations; it's on inter-group relations.

Q. I mean without regard to the racial factor, you have that situation in any organized society, don't you; some people get along better than others, run things, are leaders; others tagging along and are not leaders.

A. This is true and our problem is to work so that everybody has a niche into which he fits.

Q. How would you eliminate that aspect of life in a school system where some children are not the leaders and don't run the show and are sort of left out, so they don't have an inferiority feeling that they are second-[fol. 300] class? How would you get rid of that?

A. As a matter of fact we have been doing some work on that at the center for inter-group education. Our work deals with schools. Well, for example, in one school children said you are separated here according to whether or not you belong to the cashmere sweater set, so this became the problem that we worked on. The way that we usually do it is sitting down with young people themselves and talking about why people do exclude other people and why this is important to them and what are the values in learning to live with people who are different from you and being able to accept them.

Q. Well, without regard to your—adoption of your theories and your opinion here in the school system, you are still going to have that problem considering the practicalities of the situation.

A. The problem of rejection and acceptance is one that will be with all of us all through life.

Q. Surely. Isn't it awfully difficult for you to have the experience of a negro child so that you could expertly say what he feels, a first grader and a third grader, and so forth, how he feels about anything.

A. Is it difficult for me?

Q. Certainly, to put your mind—I mean to—for you to assume the feelings of a negro child that is in these elementary grades? How do you do that?

A. It is difficult for me really to understand the experiences of anyone else, but this is part of my job.

Q. Well, I grant all that, but how do you do it; how can you tell what I feel and react and my reactions, and so forth, to a set of facts or my social relations.

A. How do I actually do it?

Q. How do you tell it, yes.

A. Well, I try to put myself in the other person's place.

Q. Well, I know that, but I mean is it like a mathematical problem that we have got in algebra so that you can add it up and prove it.

A. We do have techniques for doing this sort of thing and the technique is known as role-playing, and I would be glad to describe it to you.

Q. If some of your assumptions are wrong, then your whole conclusions you reach are wrong too, aren't they; isn't that right? That's all.

A. Well—

(Witness excused.)

Mr. Carter: We were going to call our next witness, Mrs. Dorothy Crawford, but I don't believe she is here, and so we will rest.

Judge Huxman: You will rest.

Mr. Carter: Yes, sir.

[fol. 302] Judge Huxman: Plaintiff rests.

Mr. Goodell: If the Court please, I would like to be given about ten minutes. There were some members of the school system I couldn't reach last night and, because you started at 9:30, I couldn't get hold of them in time. I won't take over ten minutes.

Judge Huxman: That was too early for the school members to be out?

Mr. Goodell: No, I couldn't get in touch with them.

Judge Huxman: You want a ten-minute recess?

Mr. Goodell: If it isn't imposing, yes.

Judge Huxman: Court will be in recess.

(The court then, at 9:45 o'clock a. m., stood at recess until 9:55 o'clock a. m., at which time the following proceedings were had:)

Mr. Goodell: Does the Court want all my witnesses sworn at one time?